

New Government, new start

Working together, universities and the new Labour Government can deliver for Britain. MillionPlus outlines six quick wins the Government could take to support students and boost universities.

Recognise universities as a national asset and engage them as allies, not adversaries, and respect the importance of international students



Higher education institutions across the UK deliver world-class teaching and research and are held in global esteem. Universities stand ready to support the Government in educating the future pipeline of talent, bolstering economic growth and productivity, and delivering the essential public services workforce that the UK needs.

Despite this, negative rhetoric around the value of universities and international students has been pervasive.

MillionPlus urges the new Government to **reset the relationship between Government and higher education** and acknowledges the valuable contribution made by the United Kingdom's diverse university sector. The Government should also **make explicit that Britain welcomes international students and reaffirm its commitment to the graduate route** in its current form.

Re-commit to widening participation and reintroduce maintenance grants



Modern universities are proud placemakers and advocates for their local communities. They do much of the heavy lifting in terms of widening participation and invest considerable resources into recruiting and retaining students from less advantaged backgrounds.

However, the current funding arrangements are reducing these opportunities, with falling student applications and higher drop-out rates. This trend must be urgently addressed and the new Government should **recommit to widening participation by reintroducing maintenance grants**. We also urge the Government to initiate a review of the maintenance loan system to ensure they are appropriately adjusted for inflation.

The Government should **consider introducing a social mobility premium** to further tackle these challenges and fully recognize the additional barriers that those from lower-income backgrounds now face to entering higher education. This premium could be drawn from existing budgets, for example through OfS recurrent funding, and should be paid to institutions that create opportunities for communities that do not traditionally enter higher education, many of whom require substantial additional support.

Stabilise higher education finances



The sector faces a challenging financial environment with funding per student in England having fallen over the last decade. **A sustainable funding model is imperative and we call on the new Government to urgently establish a Taskforce to support this.** The Taskforce should pay particular attention to how a future funding system can preserve the pipeline of skills our economy and public services need. To ease pressure in the shorter term, the Government should **implement changes to the timing and profile of Student Finance England payments** to support university cash flow management.

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Work with universities and the Office for Students to deliver genuinely risk-based regulation

MillionPlus supports robust, risk-based regulation which safeguards both quality and confidence in the higher education system. The Office for Students (OfS) has however been unable to strike a balance in its regulatory requirements, placing a disproportionate burden on universities and their staff. **Condition B4, which requires assessed work to be retained for 5 years after courses finish, is one example and should be amended.**

Since its inception, new regulatory measures have been brought in by the OfS, with no other activity slowed or stopped, meaning the regulatory remit continues to expand, as do the financial costs of compliance. We call on the new Government to **commit to working with the OfS and the higher education sector to ensure that actions taken are targeted, effective and efficient and focus on regulating universities' core missions.**



Maintain funding for BTECs and other established qualifications pending a review

As it stands, established level 3 qualifications, particularly BTECs, are set to be defunded in favour of T levels, for which take up is low.

This will potentially have a damaging impact on participation in higher education, hurting the life chances of many prospective students from non-traditional HE backgrounds. While the now Government's recognition of this issue pre-election was welcome, now is the time to **commit to preserving BTECs and other applied general qualifications**, at least until a full review is completed.



Recognise that delivering the future public sector workforce requires greater joined-up working between government departments and universities

Modern universities educate the majority of the public sector workforce, including 63% of initial teacher training students and 70% of nursing students. MillionPlus universities are ready to work with the new Government to aid in meeting its teacher recruitment targets and fulfil the NHS workforce plan. Achieving this workforce will require both close coordination with universities and a whole-of-government approach. To this end, we are calling for **Prime Ministerial responsibility for greater departmental join-up** alongside active Secretaries of State across the Education and Health and Social Care departments.

Similarly, **the Department for Education should work closely with the Department for Science Innovation and Technology and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**, to ensure that universities can continue to produce impactful and translational research and innovation through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and achieve a greater regional focus.

